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Statement submitted by International Council on Social Welfare, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Joint International Council on Social Welfare — International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse written statement.

The International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), one of the oldest non-governmental organizations with a global reach, wholeheartedly supports the Commission on the Status of Women in its work aimed at social protection for girls and women of all ages. The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, (INPEA), the only recognized non-governmental organization that is exclusively focused on addressing neglect, abuse and violence against older people, recognizes the importance of social protection as a critical component of a strategy to ensure protection from abuse for all women.

An integration of a gender perspective into social protection programmes and better visibility of all women within development theory and practice has been an important outcome of international and national efforts to upheld gender equality and empowerment. But much more needs to be done. Gender inequality remains in most societies. Women often encounter barriers in accessing income, assets and services and are disproportionately represented among the poor and disenfranchised in society. Older women bear the burden of the intersectionality of sex and age and frequently lack both income and access to public services.

The importance of a gender perspective in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies and programmes has been widely recognized as a tool for achieving gender equality. In this context social protection systems and schemes are no exception. To be effective they should not be gender-blind, particularly considering such factors as feminization of poverty and entrenched gender inequality undermine the efforts aimed at poverty alleviation. Our experience on the ground demonstrates that when the design of social protection schemes envisions "gender lens", considering gender dimensions at the household, community and state levels, such approach enhances the transformative role played by such schemes. To go further in the fight against gender inequality, social protection needs to be supported by interventions that improve women's access to productive resources and services, such as legal and housing, prevent domestic violence and promote empowerment by enhancing their capabilities, decision making power and agency.

Many gender-specific dimensions are indispensable when social protections systems are conceived or reformed. For example, maternity protection that ensures income security for pregnant women and mothers of new-born children and their families could be considered one of the key component of the transformative policies called for in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and is essential to the achievement of multiple Sustainable Development Goals, including Goals 1,2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 10. New effective coverage estimates for Sustainable Development Goals indicator 1.3.1 show that only 41.1 per cent of women with new-borns worldwide receive a maternity benefit, and only 15.8 per cent of childbearing women in Africa. (World Social Protection Report 2017-2019. Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. ILO, Geneva 2017, page 27).

Widows and divorcees of all ages need a secure foothold in society and providing this is vital to the broader struggle for gender equality. Policies such as property ownership and inheritance rights reform, registration of customary marriages, an widows' pensions can help address disadvantages faced by this group. Widowhood or divorce brings serious economic hardship to affected women, and the impact of marital death and divorce may cause widowed and divorced girls and women of all ages to be excluded socially and lose their homes and property once marriage ends.

However, responsive policies can buffer women against these loses: widows' pensions can serve as a temporary social protection measure, if transferred directly and securely to them; and preferential access to housing and shelters is another measure that can help widows and divorcees, particularly in developing countries. Policies that address systemic inequalities can enable women to support themselves in the face of a marital dissolution. These include reforms to credit markets, where women are particularly disadvantaged; ensuring equal ownership and inheritance rights for women; and securing customary marriages through registration and legal documentation

Taking into consideration the ageing of the world's population, recognition that gender inequality and empowering all women and girls is a life-long process and a life cycle analysis of gender equality is needed. The gender-sensitive social protection schemes can be much more successful in addressing the root causes of vulnerability and exclusion. A lifecycle approach is indispensable in this regard, given that different risks affect women and men differently at different points in their life.

While the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment has been increasingly recognized, we must not overlook some key segments in society such as older women. Focusing on girls and women of reproductive age is important for building a foundation for empowerment of women in old age, but this is only a partial strategy. A focus on older women in the later phases of their lives is also critical to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women of all ages.

Understanding and integrating gender-specific vulnerabilities can help with the implementation of gendered adaptation practices, eventually relieving some of the disproportionally high burden of the adverse effects of climate change that women of all ages bear. For example, older women are often overlooked in discussions of gender equality, empowerment and sustainable development. Although the world's ageing population is projected to reach 2 billion by 2050, with women age 60 years and older projected to comprise over 1 billion of the ageing population at that time. Studies demonstrate that less than 10 per cent of older women need institutional care at any given time in old age. However, the stereotypic conflation of old age and dependency establishes the basis for harmful policies as well as traditional practices that exclude older women from full participation in society and do not support or recognize older women's capacity for productive and active ageing.

There are several gaps in achieving gender equality and empowerment for all women, specifically older women. While women and men experience old age differently, even though both experience age discrimination, older women also experience negative stereotypes that label them unimportant, limit their access to services and entitlements, and cause them to face cumulative life disadvantages due to lack of education, decision-making and participation in public life, access to age appropriate health care, lower earning capacity and the additional barrier of discriminatory gender-based laws and customs that apply to property and inheritance. These negative dimensions need to be considered and addressed when social protection schemes are conceived and implemented.

Discriminatory laws and practices against older women continue to fuel violence and abuse of every kind. Older women are often excluded from studies on violence, based on ageist assumptions that this group does not experience domestic violence or sexual abuse, would not remember such abuse due to age-related cognitive limitations, and would refuse to disclose such experiences because of a distaste for sharing unpleasant memories. Age cut-offs for subjects in these studies are often up to age 49, the presumed end of reproductive functioning.

Guaranteeing the free and equal right of women to own and inherit property, ensuring secure tenure of property and housing by women stays on the political and socio-economic agendas in many societies. Denial of such right represents a cle

abuse that should not be tolerated. Many older women fall victims to various financial manipulations and crooked financial schemes that rob them of their assets and property. Harmful traditional practices continue with older women accused of witchcraft, justifying some of the most horrific forms of abuse against them.

Another important policy issue that affects older women and their social and economic protection in old age is the need for recognition and valuing of unpaid work. Girls and women of all ages take on responsibility disproportionately in the family for caregiving of children and other care dependent family members, limiting their involvement in the formal workplace. If working outside the home, women of all ages are more likely than men to work in the informal economy, creating disadvantages for receiving pension benefits in old age. Older women are more likely than men to experience poverty, including extreme poverty in old age in most countries, and developed economies are no exception. It is critical to recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibilities within the household and family as nationally appropriate to ensure women are not disadvantaged economically in old age due to cumulative disadvantages throughout the life course. It is also critical to undertake reforms to give all women equal rights to economic resources as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws. This represents a tangible fight against poverty and is a clear boon to sustainable development.

To ensure that gender equality goals for older women are monitored, nations must include disaggregated data by gender and age on economic status and other indicators on an ongoing basis. For example, indicators such as "percentage of the population covered by social protection floors/systems" should be disaggregated by age and sex to allow the tracking over time older women's poverty and the outcome of policy initiatives to eliminate it. Monitoring and hence the creation of statistical visibility of inequalities creates the policy space for civil society to demand new or more effective public policies to correct inequality.

We share the conviction that the achievement of full human potential and of sustainable development is simply not possible if one half of humanity continues to be denied its full rights and opportunities. Beginning with enjoyment of equal access to education and equal opportunities for employment, the world community should continue combatting gender based-discrimination and violence in all forms it may assume, including old-age discrimination and violence.

In this light both the International Council on Social Welfare and the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse strongly believe that wider use of internationally agreed instruments such as the ILO Recommendation 202 on National Floors of Social Protection could facilitate the fight against poverty and promote women's empowerment. Social protection schemes already in use in many countries have proven critical in redressing the disproportionate impact of economic, social and environmental shocks on women, but the potential of such schemes is far from exhausted. Much more needs to be done to fully correct the disadvantages and discrimination that women still face on the labour market, in sharing of reproductive work between genders and in the education systems. However, there is a clear synergy among gender, social protection and environmental sustainability. Better and more gender-proactive social protection schemes can bring about structural changes in the economy and society, facilitating both mitigation and adaptation.

Co Signing NGO's with ECOSOC Status

Association for Women's Career Development in Hungary

Widows for Peace Through Democracy